

# THE AMERICAN COLLEGE BULLETIN

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## THE DAY OF PRAYER FOR COLLEGES.

The observance of a special Day of Prayer for Colleges may be traced back to the earliest decades of the last century. Prayer seems to have played a much more significant part in the pioneer stages of our institutions than it does today. Colleges were almost exclusively devoted to the task of preparing men for the ministry. One-half of all the graduates of the first eighty classes of Harvard entered the ministry. Of the members of the first fifty classes of Dartmouth, 70% were ministers. These proportions were not unusual for the time. It was the usual custom, also, for colleges to have daily prayers both morning and evening. Even the most radical advocate of state control of institutions in Colonial days, Governor Livingston, of New Jersey, urged the retention of daily prayer and fast days. Again, prayer was a very real factor in the pioneer life of the institutions in the West. The histories of Denison University and Allegheny College, for example, show the degree of religious faith and prayer which entered into the struggle of that early time. We would perhaps be inclined to say that a special "Day of Prayer for Colleges" was unnecessary. It is doubtful, also, whether there was sufficient unity in the educational movement up to 1800 to make possible the general observance of a special day.

### Origin of the Day

The actual origin of a uniform Day of Prayer was due to the decrease in the number of candidates for the ministry and the consequent alarm felt by the churches. Indeed, figures recently compiled show that the proportion of the ministry among college graduates reached its lowest point in 1800 (21.4%) and that compared with previous decades the church had very real cause for concern. It was decided to hold a "Concert of Prayer that the Holy Spirit may come upon the colleges and a greater number of young men be induced to enter the ministry." A certain Sunday was set apart and observed by most of the churches of New England. President Bridgman, in a study on this subject writes: "This resulted in extensive revivals in the colleges, a record number of candidates for the ministry, and a decision to continue the custom." Certainly the ratio of the ministry to other occupations of college trained men during the generation shows a steady increase from 21% in 1800 to 32.3% in 1836. A strong missionary spirit, also, is noticeable in the schools and many revivals are recorded in both church and college. The "Concert of Prayer" was observed for several years on a given Sunday and it was then decided to change from Sunday to the last Thursday in February and from a "Concert of Prayer" to the

"Day of Prayer." The earliest actual record of the observance of this day which comes to our attention is that noted by the Presbyterian Board of Education for the year 1823, stating that "the last Thursday in February was observed as a day of fasting and prayer for colleges." The Methodists observed the same date and day of the week and there is every reason to suppose that other denominations did the same. After many years this date was changed to the last Thursday in January to avoid conflict with Washington's Birthday.

### Early Observance

While the proportion of ministers among college men fell off rapidly after 1840, the special observance of the Day of Prayer seems to have continued without interruption. In 1862 Dr. A. S. Hunt, of Wesleyan University, circularized the college presidents regarding this observance and twenty-one replies are on record. They show keen appreciation of the spiritual problems of college students and the responsibilities of college administration. President Peabody, of Harvard, wrote:

"There are no four years of life during which character grows so fast as during college years. Student temptations to gross immorality are less, I think, than those which beset young men of the same age in other walks of life. There is an intensely strong tendency toward a merely material culture and the formation of opinions and habits of thought from which God and the religious element are shut out. I sincerely believe that no form of vice so hardens the heart against religious truth as does a Godless learning and non-Christian philosophy."

Mark Hopkins, from whose institution much of the religious impulse of the earlier generation had come, responded in these words:

"No one who has not seen it can understand the change that is wrought in a college by a deep and powerful revival of religion. It is as light after darkness; as rain after drought; as the clear shining of the sun after rain."

This was the spirit in which the college presidents of that day responded to the appeal regarding the Day of Prayer.

### The Day Now Selected

Coming down to our own time we find a growing interest both in the Day of Prayer and the things for which it stands. Various Church Boards of Education as they were organized gave new emphasis to ministerial recruiting and to a larger recognition of education in the program of the church. The Methodist Episcopal and Presbyterian Boards have been active in this connection for many years. In 1878 the Methodist Episcopal Church South first legislated "to urge upon parents the importance of educating their children in institutions of learning under the care of our church." During the last few years the denomination has observed a particular day. Some twelve or fifteen years ago the United Brethren started an Education Day and gave it a place in their Book of Discipline. This was not generally observed, however, until five years ago under the leadership of the present Board. The Friends had an Education Day for a number of years, but this year for the first time the Board of Education secured a general observance of the day. Similarly, the Baptist colleges have had this occasion, certainly for

more than a quarter century, but no day was officially recognized by the denomination until 1915.

As a result of this activity of the various churches, some confusion of dates and forms of observance arose which made it desirable to secure a more uniform understanding. With this in mind, a Committee of the Council of Church Boards of Education recommended accepting the official Day of Prayer as the last Sunday in February, in accordance with the program of the World's Christian Student Federation, laid down in 1913, and this is the Education Sunday now observed by the Northern Baptists, the Lutheran General Synod, the United Brethren, the Presbyterian Church South, and the United Presbyterian Church.

There is a considerable diversity in practice regarding this occasion, although the official designation of the last Sunday in February still stands. The Methodist Episcopal Church observes the second Thursday in February; the Presbyterian Church U. S. A. an entire week in the middle of February (17th to 24th in 1918). The first week in January is set apart by the Disciples Church, together with a special Sunday (January 20th in 1918). The Education Week selected by the Friends this year was that of May 21st to 27th. The Lutheran United Synod South, use Holy Week for educational purposes. Among the Episcopal Churches, the third Sunday in October is at present designated as Education Sunday. (In some cases the entire week.)

### **Recent Developments**

From the beginning there seems to have been a very definite purpose in the Day of Prayer which has changed but slightly during a century. This is set forth in various church disciplines, resolutions of boards, and bulletins on the subject. The substance of this is embodied in

- (1) Arousing the Church to the significance of Christian Education.
- (2) Appealing to the youth of the Church to consecrate themselves for service as ministers, missionaries, and laymen.
- (3) Specific contributions to church colleges and the educational program.

In the accomplishment of these ends there is a tendency toward using a longer time and more highly specialized occasions. The Baptist Board suggests the last Sunday in February, or the Thursday preceding, in case a week day is preferred. The Presbyterian Church South, in addition to Sunday, specified "that the preceding Thursday be set apart as a Day of Prayer, to be observed by the Women's Auxiliaries and that the whole preceding week be observed in our homes and in our educational institutions as a season of special prayer." The Episcopal Board of Education, in addition to Education Sunday, is pressing for an entire Educational Week. The Disciples and the Presbyterian Church U. S. A. both have an entire week of prayer for colleges. With the United Presbyterian Church Sunday and the Wednesday preceding are commonly observed. These extensions of time give better opportunity for the carrying out of the idea in its various forms. The Presbyterian Church U. S. A., which has perhaps developed this occasion most effectively, sets apart the first Sunday of the week as Vocation Day, regarding which the General Assembly says, "This is the one special day when the youth of the Church shall be shown the importance of dedicating to God their life service and be informed of

the need of trained leadership in the Church's work. Thursday is set apart as the Day of Prayer for Colleges and the following Sabbath is Education Day for Colleges, established by the General Assembly in 1894 to emphasize the truth "that the training of heart and conscience, and will, and instruction in the Bible, are essential to a complete education, and to encourage support of Presbyterian Colleges." The Methodist Church South, is also urging through its Board of Education a definite Vocation Day, especially in the Sunday School. The advantage of dividing this original observance into specific services which enlist the attention of groups of people of various interests and ages is obvious. In 1915 the Presbyterian Board received \$200,000 in offerings during Education Week. In the Methodist Church, Children's Day is the occasion for a large offering for education. In most denominations suitable literature is provided, including that for various departments of the Sunday School and the effect of an Education Week is cumulative in both the church and college.

It is altogether probable that a more active insistence on the significance of this occasion, together with the co-operation of Boards and Colleges in securing that uniformity in observance which would make this a national occasion is both possible and well worth the effort involved. Certainly an occasion which grew up almost spontaneously and has survived the vicissitudes of a century of shifting educational life and still maintains its original import with a message peculiarly significant to our time, must commend itself to the heartiest approval and support of the church.

### CALL FROM THE ITALIAN FRONT

The Foreign Office of the Young Men's Christian Association is sending out through this bulletin an urgent appeal for 200 Secretaries for work in the Italian Army. The nature of this work and the qualifications required are such that it is essentially a call to teachers rather than students. For this reason the appeal should be distributed as widely as possible among college faculties.

The conditions and qualifications of this service are as follows:

**AGE:** The limits are thirty-one years to forty-five years for Americans; of other nationalities only those over forty-five and physically sound would be considered.

**LANGUAGE:** Knowledge of the Italian language is desirable but not indispensable. Men with classical training or training in Romance Languages would have an advantage in this respect.

**TIME:** The service would involve at least a year abroad, preferably more, depending on the duration of the war. It is assumed, of course, that applicants should qualify with regard to health, character, and loyalty. The Y. M. C. A. undertakes to secure to its Secretaries satisfactory financial provision, including traveling expenses and takes into account the necessary family budget.

Applicants for this service should address the Personnel Board, 347 Madison Avenue, New York City.

This work is in charge of Mr. Charles D. Hurrey of the Foreign Office of the Y. M. C. A., and in addition to the appeal for Italian work, Mr. Hurrey states that John R. Mott is asking for 700 additional men for foreign branches other than Italian.